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SUBJECT: AU PANEL OF THE WISE REPORTS ON ELECTION-RELATED  
DISPUTES IN AFRICA

11. The African Union's Panel of the Wise has completed a report examining election-related disputes and violent conflict that often characterize electoral processes in Africa. One of the report's major recommendations is to strengthen Africa's capacities at the national, regional and continental levels to observe and monitor elections. Currently, the AU's primary vehicle for observing and monitoring elections -- the Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit (DEAU)-- lacks the necessary internal and external funding to support its goal of sending observer missions to more than a dozen countries where elections are scheduled this year alone. Even the five-member Panel of the Wise, which was formed in 2007 as an instrument of conflict prevention, only has one support staff and a limited travel budget.

12. Panel member and former Organization of African Unity Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim acknowledged these challenges during a briefing on the report for AU international partners on June 5. Election monitoring and mediation efforts require adequate resources to be effective, Salim said. The DEAU has insufficient funds to carry out necessary training for election observers. As a result, election missions have been of very short duration and lack professional expertise, calling into question the credibility of their assessments of election outcomes. Given resource constraints, the AU would do better to focus on those elections that are likely to produce conflict and violence, Salim said. (Note: The AU Political Affairs Department has told USAU that it would be politically difficult not to send an observer mission to all elections. End Note.)

13. Panel of the Wise mediation efforts likewise suffer from inadequate support. "We need to have the competence and the professional capacity," Salim said. The Panel's lone support staff cannot juggle the relentless demands of the office, he continued, blaming the AU's slow recruiting practices as well as the AU's own capacity to support this endeavor. The AU is "ill-equipped" to prevent conflict, Salim asserted. "The AU has good intentions, but it does not have the wherewithal."

14. Responding to a question about the AU observer missions' assessment of last April's presidential election in Algeria, Salim conceded that the AU undermined its own credibility by declaring that the election was "free and fair." Salim said constitutional changes are not, by themselves, a problem unless the person behind the changes is seeking to remain in office longer, such as in the case of Algerian President Bouteflika.

15. The draft report, entitled "Strengthening the Role of the African Union in the Prevention, Management, and Resolution of Election-related Disputes and Violent Conflicts in Africa," has been approved by the AU Peace and Security Council and will now be on the agenda of this summer's AU Summit in Libya. USAU has forwarded a copy of the draft report to DRL/MLGA and AF/RSA, as well as to USAID AFR/SD..

16. Comment: As part of our support for the AU Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the USG has provided a small

grant to the AU which funded preventive diplomacy envoys to the Comoros and Central African Republic. Similarly, the USG is providing technical assistance through International Foundation for Electoral Systems to establish and support the DEAU. The USG is also providing equipment and software to the AU's Conflict Management Division for their Continental Early Warning System. Other partners, such as the European Union, have pledged tens of millions of Euros toward APSA. This latest report by the Panel of the Wise suggests that international partners could do much more to support APSA, particularly in the area of preventive diplomacy and early warning programs. Our AU interlocutors often remind us that greater investment in conflict prevention could dramatically decrease the cost of addressing a full-fledged conflict.

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